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Kevin Libin: On election day, Alberta confronts the betrayal that Notley made possible

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Body

CALGARY - The Alberta NDP's election ad wrapped over the front page of Saturday's Calgary Herald warned that Jason Kenney was "TOO RISKY" for Calgary. One reason, it said, was Kenney's "Reckless stunts on the Trans Mountain Pipeline." By contrast, Premier Rachel Notley, the ad said, stands for "getting pipelines built."

Even Canadians outside of Calgary are probably aware that no actual pipelines were built in the four years that Notley's government ruled Alberta. But that's the circular logic her NDP had resorted to using to try narcotizing Albertans into almost believing otherwise, as they headed into election day on Tuesday.

It goes like this: The NDP has long maintained that patience, collaboration, aggressive climate policies and negotiation with the rest of Canada is key to getting a pipeline built. Kenney's United Conservative Party believes, after watching export-pipeline projects repeatedly foiled over the past four years, that these things don't work, and that tougher measures are required, such as retaliating against B.C.'s pipeline obstructionism by cutting off energy exports and cancelling climate policies that promised to buy Alberta "social licence," but never did. Ergo, says the NDP, Kenney is "reckless" and won't get pipelines built, while the NDP is responsible and will get pipelines built. All without evidence that a pipeline will ever get built.

That hollow argument may be all Notley has to defend her pipeline legacy, which has so far produced only embarrassment for her and anguish for the province, with the oil-export bottleneck costing a fortune in revenue and jobs (Notley even had to recently force companies to curtail production to ease the glut). But even if she somehow manages to hang on to power after Tuesday, Albertans are far more jaded than they were when she took charge in 2015. Notley tried selling in Alberta a long-lost concept - a faith that Ottawa and the rest of the country would play fairly, in the name of co-operation and unity, with just a little bit of give and take from everyone. That misplaced faith was betrayed repeatedly. It won't soon surface again.

Instead, while Notley forced Alberta to give till it hurts (could there have been a worse time to impose new, investment-killing climate rules than during a historic oil-price rout?), the rest of Canada has only taken. And taken. The Trudeau government cancelled Northern Gateway and created new bans on tankers carrying Alberta crude (but not other kinds) from the province's north coast to appease anti-oilsands activists there. It scared off the Energy East pipeline proposal, appeasing Quebec, by continually raising the regulatory threshold until the owners walked away. It layered new levels of additional Indigenous consultation onto Trans Mountain, even after it received regulatory approval. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau even promised to eventually "phase out" the oilsands entirely (while global demand for oil continues to grow). And his government has created a new project-approval process with Bill C-69, currently awaiting Senate approval and unanimously opposed by the industry for its vague and unmeetable tests, like assessing the "gender impacts" of an underground tube and weighing "Indigenous knowledge" against scientific evidence.

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Kevin Libin: If the NDP loses Alberta, they'd better pray Notley sticks around(
<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/kevin-libin-if-the-ndp-loses-alberta-theyd-better-pray-notley-sticks-around/wcm/afd1e32d-ac2a-4d06-9df2-e2c9e881a72f>)

Kevin Libin: Calgary wants to fight back. 'Turning off the taps' is a punch(
<https://business.financialpost.com/opinion/kevin-libin-calgary-wants-to-fight-back-and-notley-wont-throw-a-punch>)

Vivian Krause: Rachel Notley, the Rockefellers and Alberta's landlocked oil(
<https://business.financialpost.com/opinion/vivian-krause-rachel-notley-the-rockefellers-and-albertas-landlocked-oil>)

The dog that never did bark in the Alberta election campaign was that Trudeau would not even deliver Notley the clear plan for a pipeline she desperately needed in time to salvage her credibility before Albertans voted Tuesday, despite all the trust she had put in the federal Liberals to get the Trans Mountain expansion built. Federal judges overturned the project's original approval in August, adding yet more hurdles for the government to meet on the environment and Aboriginal consultations. But after the National Energy Board once again approved Trans Mountain's new and improved application in February with a 90-day (albeit non-binding) period for the federal cabinet to respond, 53 days have ticked by as of Election Day in Alberta.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Alberta Premier Rachel Notley meet in Edmonton in September 5, 2018.

Trudeau has offered nothing useful to Notley's campaign to clearly vindicate her claims that all her climate gestures - hiring hard-core anti-oilsands opponents to legislate limits on production growth, carbon taxes more costly than even Justin Trudeau's, green subsidies running up the bill for taxpayers even as they struggled through a vicious recession and the elimination of cheap electrical coal power - have all been worthwhile.

When Notley said last week that she expected Trudeau's cabinet approval to come next month, with construction to begin in the summer, few people could bring themselves to believe her anymore. Such pipeline promises look even emptier than they did last May, when the Liberals purchased the Trans Mountain pipeline from an owner, Kinder Morgan, who was fed up with endless delays, opposition, regulatory roadblocks and the spiralling costs they all bring. "Pick up those tools, folks," Notley huzzahed at a news conference. "We said we would get the pipeline built and we are getting it built!"

Spoiler: They aren't. After a summer of curious inactivity on the construction front but plenty of activity from civil disobedients physically trying to block the project came the federal court of appeal decision. Trudeau's government, abandoning Alberta again, refused to even try appealing the ruling, insisting they owed it to First Nations opponents to follow the court's ruling, leaving Notley again, with nothing to show for her strategy.

The most likely reason for the cabinet's delay in responding to the NEB ruling now is the near impossibility of coming to terms with those few First Nations who are dead-set against Trans Mountain. The court had blamed the federal government for failing to "grapple" with their concerns, and seeking ways to change the project to address them. Legal scholars saw this as a new standard never imposed before and the likelihood Ottawa will meet it sufficiently to avoid future court blockades as not high. Natural Resources Minister Amarjeet Sohi told reporters last month that his department has met with most of the 117 Indigenous communities expected to be affected by the project, but provided no sense at all of how the grappling was going.

It only takes one First Nation to overturn it all again (the last hearing was because six bands opposed to the project sued; that more than 30 other bands supported the project mattered not). But that assumes the Trudeau Liberals, sinking in the polls and reeling from scandal, are even interested in announcing a pipeline, risking yet another summer of discontent, with protests roiling in B.C.

Surely their reputation these days for brutal political calculations suggests that Liberal election priorities must come before Alberta. Just as Quebec's pipeline opposition came before Alberta. Just as a handful of First Nations come before Alberta. Just as the Liberals' Bill C-69 social-climate-justice campaign must come before Alberta.

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Rachel Notley's rookie NDP government was the embodiment of naïve hope over experience, the belief that if Alberta just sacrificed enough, its concerns would come to count as much as those of others. She even persuaded some people here to believe it, for a while. That she and they today feel more betrayed than ever, is in large part her fault.

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